

The Kosiancic Farm in Crescent Valley

100 Years in the life of a family farm

By Ray Kosiancic

This article was adapted from the annual Christmas letter sent to friends and family by Ray Kosiancic. He lives in Crescent Valley and has an interest in classic vehicles. His collection includes a couple of the trucks he writes about in this article.

Ready or not, sit back and read my humble story of my fore fathers and all the trials and tribulations in the last 100 years.

So what do we talk and reminisce about... the past and what it means to my family and the farm that Ida and I own at Crescent Valley.

In 1898 my grandfather Jacob Kosiancic and his wife Antonia left Trieste in Austria and boarded a steamship for North America. Jacob worked in a steel mill in Pittsburgh for 10 cents an hour, 12 hours a day, and 6 days a week forging steel for the railways. There, my father Valentine was born. Hearing of a gold rush in British Columbia, Jacob and his family went to Rossland in 1900 where he found work at the Le Roi mine for \$2.50 a day. At the same time he applied for and got 400 acres of crown land in Crescent Valley paying \$2.50 an acre. Whether by accident or good fortune this lovely piece of land that overlooks the Slocan River is now the farm we own.

My grandparents had two more sons, Joe and Jack, and over the years the farm was known as Kosiancic Brothers. Everyone lived in a log and shake building with dirt floors originally built by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1893 as a bunkhouse. Fish were plentiful and so too was the wildlife. My grandmother would go out into the forest with a double-barreled shotgun in the afternoon and

shoot rabbits for that evening's dinner. My grandfather raised his own team of oxen from two large steers and like other pioneers, he raised cattle, pigs, chickens and grew most of the vegetables the family needed.

Only six families lived between Crescent Valley and Slocan at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century. There were no motor vehicles and only a wagon trail in the valley so the CPR trains were the main mode of transportation. They brought in supplies for the pioneers and prospectors and then hauled out railroad ties, lumber and ore. Jacob applied to the railroad for a siding in 1905 and was granted one provided that he shifted hundreds of yards of earth to provide a proper grade for the tracks. He worked most of the year from daylight 'til dark shoveling most of the dirt by hand but he got his own siding, the Kosiancic Spur. He loaded cordwood into boxcars at \$2.50 per cord and then shipped it to the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company, today's COMINCO.

In 1908, the valley got a new industry. Joseph Patrick and his sons, Frank and Lester, built the Patrick Sawmill at Crescent Valley. (The Patricks, of course, are well known in hockey history. Lester "The Silver Fox" Patrick and his brother Frank, pioneered the construction of Canada's first artificial rinks and formed the Pacific Coast Hockey Association). The new industry gave Jacob a new job. He secured a

The first house on the farm from 1893 is on the left, the garage is in the centre and the Chinese gardener's cabin is on the right. The poles are waiting to be shipped by rail.

Photo from the author





The 1911 farmhouse is still on the farm today.
Photo from the author

contract to supply 400 pilings 30 to 35 feet in length that were driven into the centre of the river by a steam powered pile driver on a wooden barge. Heavy planks were then secured to the piles to make a ramp on which logs could be taken into the sawmill. The mill provided settlers with a market for the timber cut from their land with logs selling for \$6.50 per thousand feet. Logging took place mostly in the winter as it was relatively easy to skid the logs over frozen ground with a team of oxen or horses. Once the logs were cut, the settlers cleared the land with a stump puller. A team of oxen would go in a circle winding up a large cable and pull the stumps but, much dynamite was used on the larger stumps.

With income from the sale of logs, Grandad was able to build a large pole barn with a shake roof and siding in 1909 and two years later, a large two story farm house made of hewn cedar logs which is still on the farm today. My grandmother was very religious and made one of the main rooms in the house into a little church with pews, religious pictures, statues and the Stations of the Cross. Priests would often come by to say Mass and nuns would visit to make a retreat. Much praying would take place.

Grandad also diversified. In 1913 he planted 250 apple trees and in 1925 loaded 700 boxes of apples into two CPR boxcars and shipped them to the Associated

Growers in Nelson. However, the \$140.00 he received was, barely enough to pay for the boxes and packing. Another disappointment followed. The next year a carload of potatoes shipped to Associated Growers was supposed to sell for \$1.25 per hundred weight, but while in storage many of them rotted. After workers sorted them, there was nearly a total loss.

Dairying was a more successful venture. Grandad constructed a fifty cow dairy in 1914 and shipped milk by train to the City Dairy in Nelson. On Sundays, when there was no train, the milk was taken by horse and wagon halfway to Nelson where a teamster and his rig from Nelson met him. Traveling on horseback, the family delivered milk to neighbours and ladled it out from a five gallon can for ten cents per quart. Until 1916 when the Empire milking machine was purchased - the first in the Kootenays - all milking was by hand. In 1920 Joe, the second son, went to Vancouver for a cheese making course and the farm began producing 1000 pounds of cheese a month which was mostly sold in Trail.

In the 1920s, the Kosiancic sons began to mechanize the farm. In 1922, Valentine, the eldest, enrolled in The Modern Automobile and Tractor School in Vancouver for a mechanics course. (He purchased his first car, a Model T, but because of trouble in keeping it running never bought another

An aerial view of the farm today. The 1911 house is shown in the bottom right of the photograph.
Photo from the author



Ford). At the same time as Valentine studied mechanics, the farm bought its first tractor, a two-ton Caterpillar Cletrac costing \$600.00. This machine was slow and two years later it was traded in for a 12-20 Case wheel tractor that cost \$1100.00.

In 1928 Valentine decided to start up a sawmill to cut lumber for sale and to build houses and other buildings on the property. He purchased a 1926 Chevrolet one ton to haul the lumber and rail ties and two Crosley single cylinder two cycle 25 hp diesel engines imported from England cost about \$1200.00 each. One was used in the sawmill and the other propelled a Gould's three cylinder piston pump which brought water up from the Slocan river and raised it to an elevation of 300 ft into a huge cement reservoir, gravity then fed the it back to the irrigation sprinklers.

Jack drove a 1928 Dodge sedan to deliver milk in the area and to haul the cheese to Trail.

Although the 1930s are usually equated with the Great Depression, the Kosiancic farm continued to diversify and expand. In 1931, a Chinese worker, Yew, was hired to run a market garden and grow vegetables and some fruit. A large three story chicken house was built in 1933 to hold 1000 hens. The eggs, along with vegetables and fruit from the market garden, were sold on the milk route. Expansion required new vehicles notably a new International

milk truck in 1936 and the next year, for \$3,000, a new three ton White truck with a fourteen foot steel flat deck and a hydraulic dump. It was one of the biggest trucks in the Kootenays. The farm was now growing 300 tons of netted gem potatoes and 100 tons of K.B. turnips each year.

In 1955 Valentine's third son Ray [the author] and his wife Ida purchased the farm. They continued the dairy business known as Raida's Dairy. The author's interest in vehicles, inherited from his father, saw him delivering milk with a custom 1964 GM pickup with a 353 Detroit Diesel engine. This special conversion was the only one in Canada and most of his customers remember hearing the "Screaming Jimmy" on the milk run. The dairy was discontinued in 1972 and Ray started driving busses for the City of Nelson and the school board. Beef cattle and hay production continued on the farm until 1995 when the cattle were sold.

And there's just part of the history of the Kosiancic farm. •